Deaf Community Accountability Model

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Within the last two decades, community accountability, community engagement, community empowerment, and community-building activities have gained attention and interest in diverse fields and for various organizations, schools, and service providers.[1] Communities have gotten together to prevent and intervene on issues related to safe neighborhoods, drunk driving, recycling, and smoking. We are also seeing that community accountability issues have started to proliferate in the domestic/sexual violence field.[2]

A community is a sociological construct and a cultural system.[3] The Alternatives to Domestic Aggression organization in Michigan defines accountability as "actions toward or involving others that reflect the integrity of the person you want to be." Put together in the context of domestic/sexual violence, "community accountability" is a community-based, collective action strategy to address violence within our communities through prevention and intervention.

Research shows that survivors are greatly influenced by their communities and healing journeys are oftentimes influenced by community responses.[4] Traumatic experiences can destroy the connections between the individual and their community, which is why restoring the connection between survivors and their community is an important part of the recovery process.[5] The extent to which a community understands and shares values and attitudes, the more dedicated and secure its members will be.[6] For example, audism,[7] like racism, prejudice and bigotry, can diminish a community's cohesiveness.[8]

This article examines community accountability with a focus on the Deaf community and Deaf culture. First, we explain the groundbreaking work of Mike Jackson and David Garvin's (1995, 2003) Community Accountability models, which we have adapted, with permission, to depict the unique experiences of the Deaf community.[9] We specifically identify examples of how members of this cultural and linguistic group can work together to support survivors and hold abusers accountable.

Community Accountability Model

In 1995, Jackson and Garvin developed the "Coordinated Community Action Model." They started out with a first draft called the "Community Accountability Wheel" and revised it after receiving feedback from over 118 reviewers who were a diversified mix of experts in the fields of domestic violence and battering, service programs, education, academics and research, politics, law/justice, government, medicine, mental health, social work, and religion. This model is a condensed presentation of how communities can act accountably in support of battered women and children, and how to also hold batterers accountable for their abusive behaviors. Jackson and Garvin emphasize that this wheel does not represent everyone and mostly identifies heterosexual hearing males as perpetrators of domestic violence.

Jackson and Garvin's wheel was inspired by and adapted from the "Power & Control Wheel" developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (Duluth, MN). The Power and Control Wheel presents abbreviated descriptions of the different forms of battering (power and control) and what they entail. It was developed through listening to the stories of violence, terror, and surviving from battered women in focus groups and documents the most common abusive behaviors and tactics that were used against them. The Power and Control Wheel has been adapted for various social groups (i.e. Spanish, Lesbian/Gay, Elderly).

Advocates from DeafHope (in Oakland, California) developed a Deaf version of the Power and Control Wheel in 2006 from interviews with Deaf domestic violence survivors over the course of five years. What they added to the Deaf wheel was "Hearing Privilege" along with "Male Privilege." It contains illustrations of the power and control behaviors/tactics in each section for Intimidation; Emotional Abuse; Minimizing, Denying and Blaming; Using Children; Male/Hearing Privilege; Economic Abuse; and Coercion/Threats. Attached to the wheel is a page and a half of text outlining examples of Deaf domestic violence experiences. Some examples include the batterer checking the survivor's teletype phone (TTY) and videophone conversations, taking advantage of the Deaf hierarchy, isolating the survivor by moving away from the Deaf community and Deaf friends, and/or spreading false rumors about the survivor, not allowing children to use sign language, and taking advantage of the system which is not fully accessible to Deaf people. This wheel, like the original Power and Control Wheel, provides sample scenarios involving heterosexual Deaf female survivors and heterosexual Deaf/hearing male perpetrators.

The first draft of Jackson and Garvin's wheel had "Community Opinion" labels on the north and south parts of it, and contained a circle in the middle that read "Batterers." The pie piece sections were (clockwise): Media, Social Service Providers, Government, Justice System, Employers, Education System, Clergy, and Men. The goal of this wheel was to portray the ideal community response to domestic violence. Jackson and Garvin wrote that community opinion "strongly states that battering is unacceptable, leads all of our social institutions to expect full accountability from the batterer by applying appropriate consequences."[10] The reviewers of this wheel mostly commented on the Justice System and commented the least on the Employers section. The wheel that was finalized has "Desire to Make a Difference" around it with a "You" in the small circle at the center instead of "Batterers." The sections in this wheel are: Health Care Systems, Justice System, Education System, Clergy, Media, Employers, Government, and Social Service Providers.

To date, the Coordinated Community Action model has been adapted by the Campaign for Action on Family Violence.[11] Their adaptation integrates some concepts from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project wheel and shows how a range of groups and sectors can to help

prevent family violence in New Zealand, with special consideration of various cultural/tribal groups specific to New Zealand. This wheel has 12 sections (clockwise): Social Service Providers (Government & Ngo); Health System; Justice System; Education System; Faith Communities; Media; Businesses and Workplaces; Government; Whaneu, Marae, Hapu, Iwi; Local Government; Community (Volunteer and Sports Groups); and Friends, Family and Neighbors.

Deaf Community Accountability

The Deaf community is a cultural and linguistic minority group. Deaf people who consider themselves culturally Deaf and use American Sign Language (ASL) identify as Deaf with a capital "D," whereas deaf people who do not identify as culturally Deaf, utilize a lower-case "d" (deaf) to describe their audiological condition of not hearing.[12] In this paper, however, we do not use these distinctions in identity and utilize a capital "D" – not to place a specific identity on individuals, but to signify that Deaf culture is the birthright of every Deaf individual whether or not they have been exposed to or experienced Deaf culture.[13] We believe that Baker and Padden provide the most pragmatic definition of the Deaf community, which is made up of those who "share a common language, common experiences and values, and a common way of interacting with each other, and with hearing people." [14] The Deaf community includes Deaf people committed to American Sign Language as well as other active participants in the community, such as children of Deaf adults (CODAs) and ASL interpreters.[15]

Through our work at Advocacy Services for Abused Deaf Victims (ASADV),[16] we have observed that community – particularly the Deaf community – plays a significant part of Deaf people's lives and has a great impact on individuals when they are surviving in or have survived domestic violence/sexual assault situations and/or are journeying towards recovery (thriving). Survivors often tell us – individually and in support groups – that they wish the Deaf community was more supportive in holding abusers accountable for their actions. When a Deaf survivor feels a lack of support from the Deaf community, it only perpetuates isolation, depression, and lack of trust.[17] Barber, Wills & Smith further noted that the insular nature of the Deaf community affects Deaf survivors. The community tends to be very tight-knit and small enough that Deaf people not only know local community members, but also Deaf people throughout the United States.[18]

Deaf people are visually oriented beings and if we want to depict the experiences of Deaf people in domestic violence situations and portray ideal responses of community accountability in the Deaf community, we need to diverge from hearing ideologies.[19] The Deaf Community Accountability Wheel was inspired by the concepts and the text of Jackson and Garvin's Community Accountability frameworks as well as the concepts and illustrations in DeafHope's (2006) Power and Control Wheel.

The eight sections of the Deaf Community Accountability Wheel, which we developed, are (clockwise and not in order of importance): Media, Service Providers, Government, Employers, Justice System/Law Enforcement, Deaf Education, Hearing Allies, and Deaf Community. The wheel is entirely visual and was illustrated by Adrean Clark, a reputable Deaf cartoonist. The upper part of the wheel reads, "Community Opinion" and the lower part of the wheel reads, "A Desire to Make a Difference." The middle circle depicts two people signing "Community" and "Accountability." The purpose of this wheel is to show how individuals and groups in the North American Deaf community can act accountably in ways that support battered Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and signing people and children, and to hold batterers accountable for their actions. We also developed text to accompany the illustrations in the wheel.

Figure 1: Deaf Community Accountability Wheel (Esposito & Whyte, 2011).

Media

- Social media, internet, television, print, and other forms of media will educate (not glorify) about the dynamics and consequences of violence experienced by Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and signing people.

- Recognize and celebrate Deaf domestic violence agencies/supporters as well as peace and nonviolence. Highlight efforts and events that promote nonviolence.

- Cease labeling domestic violence inappropriately (i.e. "it's between them," "not my/our business," "s/he should leave," "s/he has a bad temper") and stop portraying abusers' excuses/lies as if they were the truth.

- All forms of media are made accessible to Deaf and Deaf-Blind people through captions/subtitles, American Sign Language, and visual representations.

Service Providers

- Service providers and agencies will become social change advocates by helping ensure Deaf and Deaf-Blind clients are safe [i.e. agencies run by, of, and for Deaf/Deaf-Blind people, mental health professionals, medical professionals, interpreting agencies, vocational rehabilitation offices (VR, VESID), support service providers (SSPs), social security offices (SSI, SSDI), audiologists].

- Domestic/sexual violence agencies, shelters, and supporters will provide accessible services to Deaf and Deaf-Blind individuals and their families and will contact Deaf domestic/sexual violence agencies and/or other Deaf advocacy/support agencies for support and/or consultation.

- Establish guidelines for care, advocacy, and/or referrals regarding domestic violence.

- Utilize local referral resources and treatment programs for abusers (i.e. batterer's intervention programs, anger management).

- Ensure interventions are culturally and linguistically appropriate. Embrace Deaf-centered approaches.

- For mental health providers: Routinely ask questions regarding violence in intake sessions. Do not provide couples/marriage counseling in domestic violence cases.

Government

- Enact laws which provide more protection to survivors and more serious consequences for perpetrators.

- Maintain a cultural and linguistic accessible analysis in all laws relating to domestic violence services for Deaf and Deaf-Blind people.

- Provide secure funding for Deaf domestic/sexual violence services.

- **Employers**

- Condition batterers continuing employment on remaining nonviolent.

- Safeguard survivors, who are employees, by providing and negotiating flexible schedules, LOAs, employee assistance programs, counseling and support.

- Incorporate provisions in Human Resource policies which address violence in the workplace and the ramifications of such acts. Intervene against any violence in the workplace.

- Provide domestic violence training to all staff and managers. Train supervisors to recognize violence, harassment, and stalking in the workplace.

- Recognize that the dynamics vary for Deaf and Deaf-Blind survivors in a predominately Deaf workplace, as opposed to a hearing or mainstreamed workplace. Attention needs to be given to issues of confidentiality, boundaries, and safety.

Justice System/Law Enforcement

- Receive ongoing in-service trainings and professional development regarding working with Deaf survivors and responding appropriately to domestic violence situations involving at least one Deaf person.

- Understand the unique dynamics of Deaf-Deaf and Deaf-hearing domestic violence situations so that survivors are not re-victimized by the system (i.e. wrongfully charging a survivor, not providing qualified interpreters, or having a protocol in place to ensure that an interpreter is provided).

- Understand that there are various subgroups within the Deaf community (i.e. Deaf, Deaf-Blind, Deaf with developmental delays, Deaf immigrants) and ensure that appropriate and effective access to communication and information is available and provided.

- Respond to domestic violence situations by talking with the individuals involved separately and directly. Refrain from using hearing batterers as interpreters for Deaf and Deaf-Blind survivors.

- Refrain from using children and other family members as interpreters for Deaf and Deaf-Blind survivors.

- Receive training and information regarding working with Interpreting agencies, certified ASL Interpreters and Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDIs).

- Contact Deaf domestic/sexual violence agencies for support/advocacy; refer Deaf and Deaf-Blind individuals to these agencies.

- Ensure that any and all information and resources made available for hearing survivors are equally as available and accessible for Deaf and Deaf-Blind survivors [i.e. phone services (victim advocate hotline), ability to walk into a police station without any barriers (call box)].

- Provide easily accessible and enforceable protection orders.

- Root out audism and biases towards Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and signing people.

Deaf Education

- Provide ongoing Deaf-centered professional development for teachers, educators, faculty, staff, and support staff that are Deaf and/or work with Deaf people/students to better respond to domestic violence in their students' lives.

- Teach Deaf-centered violence prevention, peace-honoring conflict resolutions, and communication skills in schools and colleges (Deaf schools, Deaf programs, mainstream environments) and model these skills throughout the school.

- Address bullying and dating violence in schools in addition to domestic and sexual violence (Deaf-centered).

- Deaf Education and Interpreter Training Programs, at the undergraduate and graduate levels, incorporate Deaf-centered domestic and sexual violence seminars/courses.

Hearing Allies

- An ally is a supporter/friend, not a helper, who supports Deaf and Deaf-Blind survivors, in different ways, especially in regards to safety issues. Hearing allies may or may not know ASL and may or may not be part of the Deaf community.

- Work with members of the Deaf community to hold Deaf and hearing abusers accountable.

- Donate professional skills and services (i.e. legal, financial, educational), time, and/or money to support Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and signing survivors as well as the work of Deaf domestic/sexual violence agencies.

- Receive training about the unique issues Deaf and Deaf-Blind people experience in domestic violence situations and encourage other hearing people to become educated as well.

- Be willing to learn from Deaf and Deaf-Blind people about the unique issues they face in domestic violence situations.

- Cease the practice of accepting hearing privilege in all its forms. Acknowledge audism. Embrace Deaf-centered approaches.

Deaf Community

- All members of the Deaf community (i.e. Deaf people, CODAs, Interpreters) support peace and oppose violence.

- Use peer support to help prevent and stop any form of violence. If you see someone being abused, ask them if they would like help and/or inform them where they can get help.

- Confront people who abuse and call them on it. Place the responsibility on the abusers by asking them why they abuse (instead of asking survivors why they stay(ed)).

- All Deaf social clubs and interest groups will address and confront violence at Deaf clubs, Deaf organization events and programs, Deaf sports events/leagues/tournaments, Deaf poker/euchre games, Deaf conferences, and Deaf church or spiritual services and gatherings. Make it clear that violent, abusive, and controlling behaviors are unacceptable.

- Listen to Deaf and Deaf-Blind survivors' requests for support. Be especially supportive with the additional challenges survivors may face because of "small world" and "grapevine" issues (i.e. Orders of Protection in place and risk of seeing perpetrators at Deaf events, relocating to a new geographical area, avoid talking about them behind their back/gossiping, avoid making judgments).

- Cease labeling domestic violence inappropriately (i.e. "that's between them," "not my/our business," "s/he should leave," "s/he has a bad temper," "it's not abuse, it is strong facial expressions, which is part of Deaf culture") and stop portraying abusers' excuses/lies as if they were the truth.

- Refrain from using the hierarchical status of an abuser (i.e. Deaf community leader, Deaf family) as a reason not to intervene and instead make the safety and welfare of the survivor of paramount importance.

- Learn more about domestic violence and attend Deaf domestic violence events/programs.

- Donate professional skills and services (i.e. legal, financial, educational), time, and/or money to support survivors and Deaf domestic/sexual violence agencies and events/programs.

- Promote positive discipline of children and do not use physical punishment or spanking ("hands are for signing, not for hitting").

Conclusion

The Deaf Community Accountability Wheel in this article is a starting point and is not a conclusive demonstration. It is our goal to emulate the process Jackson and Garvin utilized in finalizing their model, which included contacting reviewers from various constituencies for feedback, making this a community effort.[20] We believe that violence against women, men, and children can only be stopped when members of our respective communities step up and hold abusers accountable. We have been asking the wrong questions to the wrong people—asking the survivors, "Why don't you just leave?" or "Why did you let them (abusers) do that to you?"—when we really should be directing the questions to the abusers by asking them, "Why are you hurting this person?" or "Do you realize that your abusive behavior is not acceptable?" This is the heart of community accountability. It's time for us to be the change we wish to see in our communities and it is not a question of whether we can make a difference, but whether we are willing to.

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